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# LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN.

*A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS.*

BY

## OSCAR WILDE

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# LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN.

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*Played for the first time at the St. James's Theatre, on Saturday, February 20th, 1892.*

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*CHARACTERS:*

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| Lord Windermere... ... ... | MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER |
| Lord Darlington ... ... ... | MR. NUTCOMBE GOULD |
| Lord Augustus Lorton ... ... | MR. H. H. VINCENT |
| Mr. Charles Dumby ... ... | MR. A. VANE TEMPEST |
| Mr. Cecil Graham... ... ... | MR. BEN WEBSTER |
| Mr. Hopper ... ... ... | MR. ALFRED HOLLES |
| Parker ... ... ... ... | MR. V. SANSBURY |
| Lady Windermere... ... ... | MISS LILY HANBURY |
| The Duchess of Berwick ... ... | MISS FANNY COLEMAN |
| Lady Plimdale ... ... ... | MISS GRANVILLE |
| Mrs. Cowper-Cowper ... ... | MISS A. de WINTON |
| Lady Jedburgh ... .. ... | MISS B. PAGE |
| Lady Agatha Carlisle ... ... | MISS LAURA GRAVES |
| Rosalie ... ... ... ... | MISS W. DOLAN |
| Mrs. Erlynne ... ... ... | MISS MARION TERRY |

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ACT I.—Morning-room in Lord Windermere's House.

ACT II.—Drawing-room in Lord Windermere's House.

ACT III.—Lord Darlington's Rooms.

ACT IV.—Morning-room in Lord Windermere's House.

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The action of the play is supposed to take place in the present time.

# LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN.

## *PROPERTY PLOT.*

### ACT I.

*Time of Representation:*—Twenty-six minutes.

FURNITURE USED—2 arm and 6 small chairs. Settee. 2 medium-sized tables, inlaid. 3 cabinets. Piano and stool. Bureau, very handsome. Electric bell-push near door R. Curtains and rugs. Carpet. Clock and ornaments. Palms and pedestals.

HAND PROPERTIES—Silver tea service on silver tray. Milk, sugar and tea for same.

OTHER PROPERTIES REQUIRED—Inkstand. Bowl for roses. Blotter. Pens, writing paper, paper knife, 2 special bank books, invitation cards. Roses. Fan in case. Photograph album on cabinet R.C.

LIGHTS—Full up right through. Bunches in entrances. Amber limes from perches and behind window.

NOTE—The furniture should be Chippendale.

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### ACT II.

*Time of Representation:*—Twenty-three minutes.

FURNITURE USED—Settee. Ottoman. Lady's inlaid writing table. 2 small tables. 7 chairs. Fender and fire-irons. Mirror and ornaments for mantelpiece. Chandelier. Candlesticks and candles. 2 standard lamps. Clock, ornaments, palms, and pedestals to dress scene. Light carpet and curtains.

PROPERTIES—Writing materials. Inkstand.

LIGHTS—Full up at commencement. On cue "as I think right," Lady Windermere exits. Parker enters and turns down lamps. Lights half down. Bunches in entrances. Amber from perches. Lamps lit. Blue lime behind windows.

NOTE—The furniture should be handsome pink and gold.

## ACT III.

*Time of Representation* :—Eighteen minutes.

FURNITURE USED—Chesterfield couch. 3 large lounge chairs. 6 handsome small chairs. 1 medium-sized oak table. 1 medium-sized writing table. 1 small table. 1 cabinet. Candelabra and candles. 2 standard lamps. Dark Turkish carpet. Handsome fur rugs. Tapestry curtains. Ornaments to dress scene. Palms and pedestals.

PROPERTIES REQUIRED—Tantalus. 2 syphons of soda. 6 tumblers. 2 large tumblers. Pack of cards. 6 small ash trays. 4 match stands. Newspapers and periodicals. Inkstand. Writing materials. 2 tablecloths.

LIGHTS—Full up right through. Amber limes from perches. Bunches in entrances. Red lime in fireplace. Blue lime behind windows C.

NOTE—The furniture should be luxurious.

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## ACT IV.

*Time of Representation* :—Twenty-one minutes.

FURNITURE USED—Same as Act I.

HAND PROPERTIES—Salver for Parker and card. 2 photographs off door R.

OTHER PROPERTIES REQUIRED—Inkstand. Blotter. Writing materials. Telegraph forms on bureau. A.B.C. railway guide.

LIGHTS—Full up throughout. Amber limes from perches and behind window. Bunches in entrances.

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The interval between Acts 1 and 2 should be ten minutes, between Acts 2 and 3 twelve minutes, and between Acts 3 and 4 ten minutes.

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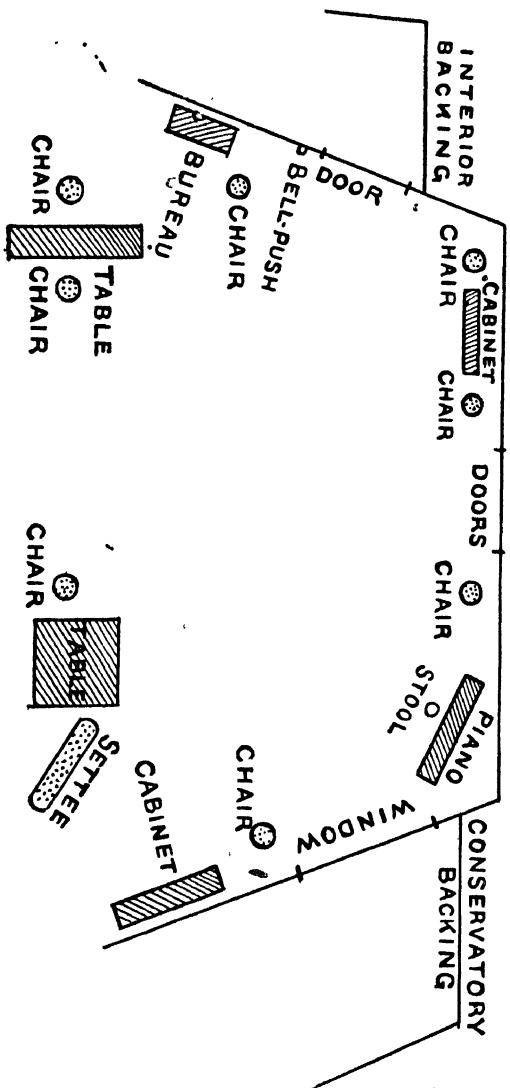
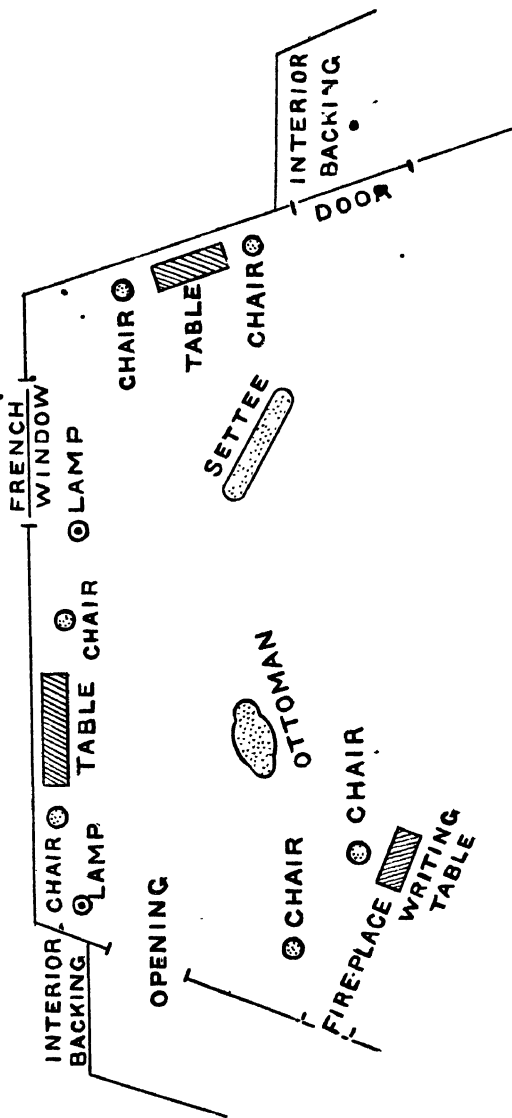
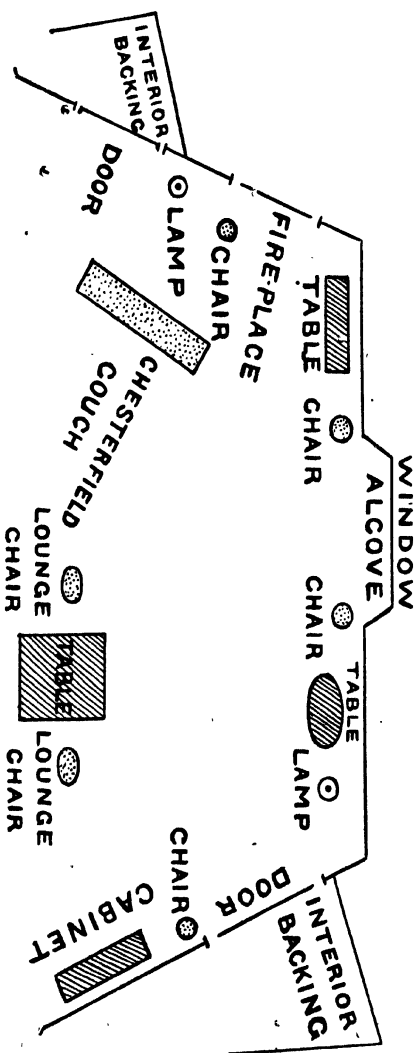

## ACT 2.

GARDEN CLOTH
BALUSTRADE PIECE
FRENCH WINDOW
INTERIOR BACKING
CHAIR
LAMP
TABLE
CHAIR
LAMP
CHAIR
TABLE
CHAIR
OPENING
SETTEE
OTTOMAN
CHAIR
CHAIR
FIRE-PLACE
WRITING TABLE
DOOR
INTERIOR BACKING

# ACT 3.

## GARDEN CLOTH



## ACT 4.

Repeat Act 1, but the settee is moved from beside the table L. C. and a chair put in its place. The settee is moved to R. C. in place of the table and two chairs, which are taken off.

# LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN.

## ACT I.

SCENE.—*Morning-room of* LORD WINDERMERE'S *house in Carlton House Terrace. Fan on table, decorations, tapestries, panels, book-cases (oak), large bureau with book and papers.*

LADY WINDERMERE *is at table* R., *arranging roses in a bowl.*

*Enter* PARKER L.C.

PARKER. Is your ladyship at home this afternoon?

LADY W. Yes—who has called?

PARKER. Lord Darlington, my lady.

LADY W. (*hesitates for a moment*) Show him up—and I'm at home to *anyone* who calls.

PARKER. Yes, my lady. (*exit* L.C.)

LADY W. It's best for me to see him before to-night. I'm glad he's come.

*Enter* PARKER L.C.

PARKER. Lord Darlington.

*Enter* LORD DARLINGTON L.C.

LORD D. How do you do, Lady Windermere? (*exit* PARKER)

LADY W. How do you do, Lord Darlington? No, I can't shake hands with you. My hands are all wet with these roses. Aren't they lovely? They came from Selby

LORD D. They are perfect. (*sees fan on table*) And what a wonderful fan. May I look at it?

LADY W. Do. Pretty, isn't it? It's got my name on it, and everything. I have only just seen it myself. It's my husband's birthday present to me. You know to-day is my birthday.

LORD D. No? Is it really?

LADY W. Yes, I'm of age to-day. Quite an important day in my life, isn't it? That is why I am giving this party to-night. (*still arranging flowers*)

LORD D. I wish I had known it was your birthday, Lady Windermere. I would have covered the whole street in front of your house with flowers, for you to walk on. They are made for you.

LADY W. Lord Darlington, you annoyed me last night at the Foreign Office. (*enter* PARKER C., *with tray and tea things*) I am afraid you are going to annoy me again.

LORD W. I, Lady Windermere?

LADY W. Put it there, Parker. That will do. (*wipes her hands with her pocket handkerchief, goes to tea-table* L. *and sits down*) Won't you come over, Lord Darlington?

*Exit* PARKER.

LORD D. (*taking chair goes across* L.C.) I am quite miserable, Lady Windermere. You must tell me what I did. (*sits down at table* L.C.)

LADY W. Well, you kept paying me elaborate compliments the whole evening.

LORD D. (*smiling*) Ah, nowadays we are all of us so hard up that the only pleasant things to pay *are* compliments. They're the only things we *can* pay.

LADY W. (*shaking her head*) No, I am talking very seriously. You mustn't laugh. I am quite serious. I don't like compliments, and I don't see why a man should think he is pleasing a woman enormously when he says to her a whole heap of things that he doesn't mean.

LORD D. Ah, but I did mean them. (*takes tea which she offers him*)

LADY W. (*gravely*) I hope not. I should be sorry to have to quarrel with you, Lord Darlington. I like you very much, you know that. But I shouldn't like you at all if I thought you were like what most other men are. Believe me, you are better than most men, and sometimes I think you pretend to be worse.

LORD D. We all have our little vanities, Lady Windermere.

LADY W. Why do you make that your special one? (*still seated at table* L.)

LORD D. (*still seated* L.C.) Oh, nowadays so many conceited people go about society pretending to be good, that I think it shows rather a sweet and modest disposition to pretend to be bad. Besides, there is this to be said, if you pretend to be good the world takes you very seriously, if you pretend to be bad they don't. Such is the stupidity of optimism.

LADY D. Don't you *want* the world to take you seriously then, Lord Darlington?

LORD D. No, not the world. Who are the people the world takes seriously? All the dull people one can think of. I should like *you* to take me very seriously, Lady Windermere, *you* more than anyone else in life.

LADY W. Why—why me?

LORD D. Because I think we might be great friends. Let us be great friends—you'll want a friend some day.

LADY W. Why do you say that?

LORD D. Oh—we all want friends at times.

LADY W. I think we're very good friends already, Lord Darlington. We can always remain so as long as you don't——

LORD W. Don't what?

LADY W. Don't spoil it by saying silly extravagant things to me. You think I am a Puritan, I suppose? Well, I *have* something of a Puritan in me. I was brought up like that. I am glad of it. My mother died when I was a mere child. I lived always with my aunt, father's elder sister, you know. She was stern to me, but she taught me what the world is forgetting, the difference there is between what is right and what is wrong. *She* allowed of no compromise. *I* allow of none.

LORD D. Dear Lady Windermere!

LADY W. You look on me as being behind the age—Well, I am! I should be sorry to be on the same level as an age like this.

LORD D. You think the age very bad then?

LADY W. Yes. Nowadays people seem to look on life as a speculation. It is not a speculation. It is a sacrament. It's ideal is Love. It's purification is sacrifice.

LORD D. Oh, anything is better than being sacrificed.

LADY W. Don't say that.

LORD D. I do say it. I feel it—I know it.

*Enter* PARKER L.C.

PARKER. The men want to know if they are to put the carpets on the terrace for to-night, my lady?

LADY W. You don't think it will rain, Lord Darlington, do you?

LORD D. I won't hear of its raining on your birthday.

LADY W. Tell them to do it at once, Parker. (*exit* PARKER C.)

LORD D. (*still seated*) Do you think then—Of course I am only putting an imaginary instance—do you think that in the case of a young married couple, say about two years married—that if the husband suddenly becomes the intimate friend of a woman of—well, more than doubtful character, is always calling upon her—lunching with her, and probably paying her bills—do you think the wife should not console herself?

LADY W. (*frowning*) Console herself?

LORD D. Yes, I think she should—I think she has the right.

LADY W. Because the husband is vile, should the wife be vile also?

LORD D. Vileness is a terrible word, Lady Windermere.

LADY W. It is a terrible thing, Lord Darlington.

LORD D. Do you know I am afraid that good people do a great deal of harm in this world. Certainly the greatest harm they do is that they make badness of such extraordinary importance. It is absurd to divide people into good and bad. People are either charming or tedious. I take the side of the charming, and you, Lady Windermere, can't help belonging to them.

LADY W. Now, Lord Darlington. (*rising and crossing* R., *front of him*) Don't stir, I am merely going to finish my flowers. (*goes to table* R.C.)

LORD D. (*rising and moving chair*) I must say I think you are very hard on modern life, Lady Windermere. Of course there is much against it, I admit. Most women, for instance, nowadays are rather mercenary.

LADY W. Don't talk about such people.

LORD D. Well, then, setting mercenary people aside, who of course are dreadful, do you think seriously that women who have committed what the world calls a fault should never be forgiven?

LADY W. (*standing* R. *of table*) I think they should never be forgiven.

LORD D. And men? Do you think that there should be the same laws for men as there are for women?

LADY W. Certainly.

LORD D. I think life too complex a thing to be settled by these hard and fast rules.

LADY W. If we had these hard and fast rules we should find life much more simple.

LORD D. You allow no exceptions?

LADY W. None.

LORD D. Ah, what a fascinating Puritan you are, Lady Windermere.

LADY W. You've forgotten your promise. The adjective was unnecessary, Lord Darlington.

LORD D. I couldn't help it. I can resist everything except temptation.

LADY W. Ah, you have the modern affectation of weakness, Lord Darlington.

LORD D. (*coming* L.) It's only an affectation, Lady Windermere.

*Enter* PARKER L.C.

PARKER. The Duchess of Berwick and Lady Agatha Carlisle.

*Enter* DUCHESS *and* LADY AGATHA CARLISLE L.C.; *exit* PARKER C.

DUCH. (*coming down* C. *and shaking hands*) Dear Margaret, I am so pleased to see you. You remember Agatha, don't you? (*crossing* L.C.) How do you do, Lord Darlington? I won't let you know my daughter, you are far too wicked.

LORD D. How can you say that, Duchess? As a wicked man, I am a complete failure. Why, there are lots of people who say I have never really done anything wrong in the whole course of my life. Of course they only say it behind my back.

DUCH. Isn't he dreadful? Agatha, this is Lord Darlington. (LORD DARLINGTON *crosses* R.C.) Mind you don't believe a word he says. (DUCHESS *crosses and sits on couch*) No, no tea, thank you, dear. We have just had tea at Lady Markby's. Such bad tea, too. It was quite undrinkable. I wasn't at all surprised; her own son-in-law supplies it. We're looking forward to your ball to-night.

LADY W. Oh, you mustn't think it is going to be a ball, Duchess. (*seated* L.C.) It is only a dance in honour of my birthday. A small and early.

LORD D. (*standing* L.C.) Very small, very early, and very select, Duchess.

DUCH. (*on couch* L.) Of course it's going to be select. But we know *that*, dear Margaret, about *your* house. It is really one of the few houses in London where I can take Agatha, and where I can feel perfectly secure about dear Berwick. I don't know what society is coming to. The most dreadful people seem to go everywhere. They certainly come to my parties—the men get quite furious if one doesn't ask them. Really, someone should make a stand against it.

LADY W. I will, Duchess. I will have no one in my house about whom there is any scandal.

LORD D. (R.C.) Oh, don't say that, Lady Windermere. I should never be admitted.

DUCH. Oh, men don't matter. With women it is different. We're good. Some of us are, at least. But we are positively getting elbowed into the corner. Our husbands would really forget our existence if we didn't nag at them from time to time, just to remind them that we have a perfect legal right to do so.

LORD D. It's a curious thing, Duchess, about the game of marriage—a game, by the way, that is going out of fashion—the wives hold all the honours, and invariably lose the odd trick.

DUCH. The odd trick? Is that the husband

LORD D. It would be rather a good name for the modern husband.

DUCH. Dear Lord Darlington, how thoroughly depraved you are.

LADY W. Lord Darlington is trivial.

LORD D. (*crossing to her*) Ah, don't say that, Lady Windermere.

LADY W. Why do you *talk* so trivially about life then?

LORD D. Because I think that life is far too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it. (*moves up* C. ; LADY WINDERMERE *rises; goes* R.C.)

DUCH. What does he mean? Do, as a concession to my poor wits, Lord Darlington, just explain to me what you really mean.

LORD D. (*coming down back of table*) I think I had better not, Duchess. Nowadays, to be intelligible is to be found out. Good-bye. (*shakes hand with* DUCHESS *and* AGATHA) And now (*goes up stage*) Lady Windermere, good-bye. I may come to-night, mayn't I?

LADY W. (*standing up stage with* LORD DARLINGTON) Yes, certainly. But you are not to say foolish, insincere things to people.

LORD D. Ah, you are beginning to reform me—it is a dangerous thing to reform anyone, Lady Windermere.

*Exit* LORD DARLINGTON L.C. ; *sunset effect starts.*

DUCH. (*who has risen; goes* C.) What a charming, wicked creature. I like him so much, and I'm so glad he's gone. How sweet you're looking. And now I must tell you how sorry I am for you, dear Margaret. Agatha darling—

LADY A. Yes, mamma. (*rises*)

DUCH. Will you go and look over the photograph album that I see there?

LADY A. Yes, mamma. (*goes to table up* L.)

DUCH. (*taking* AGATHA'S *chair*) Dear girl—she is so fond of photographs of Switzerland. Such a pure taste, I think. But I really am so sorry for you, dear.

LADY W. (*smiling*) Why, Duchess?

DUCH. Oh, on account of that horrid woman. She dresses so well, too, which makes it much worse, sets such a dreadful example. Augustus—you know, my disreputable brother, such a trial to us all—well, Augustus is completely infatuated about her. It is quite scandalous, for she is absolutely inadmissible into Society. Many a woman has a past; but I'm told that she has at least a dozen, and that they all fit.

LADY W. But who are you talking about, Duchess?

DUCH. About Mrs. Erlynne.

LADY W. Mrs. Erlynne? I never heard of her. What has she to do with me?

DUCH. My poor child! Agatha darling——

LADY A. Yes, mamma.

DUCH. Will you go out on the terrace and look at the sunset?

LADY A. Yes, mamma. (*exit through window* R.)

DUCH. (*following to window and looking after her*) Sweet girl. So fond of sunsets—shows such refinement of feeling, I think. (*coming down* L.) After all, there is nothing like nature, is there?

LADY W. But what is it, Duchess? Why do you talk to me about this person?

DUCH. (*sits on sofa* L.) Don't you really know? I assure you we're all so distressed about it. Only last night at dear Lady Jansen's everyone was saying how extraordinary it was that, of all men in London, Windermere should behave in such a way.

LADY W. My husband—what has *he* to do with any woman of that kind?

DUCH. Ah, what indeed, dear? That is the point. He goes to see her continually, and stops for hours at a time. And while he is there she is not at home to anyone. Not that many ladies call on her, dear, but she has a great many disreputable men friends—my own brother particularly, as I told you—and that is what makes it so dreadful about Windermere. We looked upon *him* as being such a model husband, but I am afraid there is no doubt about it. My dear nieces—you know the Saville girls, don't you?—such nice domestic creatures—plain, dreadfully plain, but so good—well, they're always at the window doing fancy work, and making ugly things for the poor, which I think so useful of them in these dreadful socialistic days. Well, this terrible woman has taken a house in Curzon Street, right opposite them—such a respectable street too. I don't know what we're coming to. And they tell me that Windermere goes there four or five times a week—they *see* him. They can't help it—and although they never talk scandal, they—well, of course—they remark on it to everyone. And the worst of it all is that I have been told that this woman has got a great deal of money out of somebody, for it seems that she came to London six months ago without anything at all to speak of, and now she has this charming house in Mayfair, drives her ponies in the Park every afternoon—and all—well, all—since she has known poor dear Windermere.

LADY W. Oh, I can't believe it.

DUCH. But it's quite true, my dear. The whole of London

knows it. That is why I felt it was better to come and talk to you, and advise you to take Windermere away at once—to Homburg, or to Aix, where he'll have something to amuse him, and where you can *watch* him all day long. I assure you, my dear, that on several occasions after I was first married I had to pretend to be very ill, and was obliged to drink the most unpleasant mineral waters, merely to get Berwick out of town. He was so susceptible, though I am bound to say he never gave way any large sums of money to anybody. He is far too high principled for that——

LADY W. (*interrupting*) Duchess, Duchess, it's impossible. (*rising and going* C.) We are only married two years; our child is but six months old. (*sits in chair* R. *of* L. *table*)

DUCH. Ah, the dear pretty baby. How is the darling? Is it a boy or a girl? I hope a girl—ah, no, I remember it's a boy. I'm sorry. Boys are so wicked. My boy is excessively immoral. You wouldn't believe at what hour he comes home. He's only left Oxford a few months—I really don't know what they teach them there.

LADY W. Are all men bad?

DUCH. Oh, all of them, my dear, all of them, without any exception. And they never grow any better. Men become old, but they never become good.

LADY W. Windermere and I married for love.

DUCH. Oh, we all begin like that. It was only Berwick's brutal and incessant threats of suicide that made me accept him at all, and before the year was out he was running after all kinds of petticoats, every colour, every shape, every material. In fact, before the honeymoon was over, I caught him winking at my maid, a most pretty, respectable girl. I dismissed her at once, without a character—no, I remember, I passed her on to my sister; her husband, Sir George, is so near-sighted, I thought it wouldn't matter, but it did, though—it was most unfortunate. (*rises*) And now, my dear child, I must go, as we are dining out. And mind you don't take this little aberration of Windermere's too much to heart. Just take him abroad, and he'll come back to you all right.

LADY W. (C.) Come back to me?

DUCH. (L.C.) Yes, dear, these wicked women get our husbands away from us, but they always come back to us—slightly damaged, of course. And don't make scenes, dear—men hate them.

LADY W. It is very kind of you, Duchess, to come and tell me all this. But I can't believe that my husband is untrue to me.

DUCH. Pretty child, I was like that once. Now I know

that all men are monsters. (LADY WINDERMERE *rings bell*) The only thing to do is to feed the brutes well; a good cook works wonders, and that I know you have. My dear Margaret, you are not going to cry?

LADY W. You needn't be afraid, Duchess; I never cry!

DUCH. That's quite right, dear. Crying is the refuge of plain women, and the ruin of pretty ones. Agatha darling!

LADY A. (*entering* L.) Yes, mamma. (*stands back of table* L.C.)

DUCH. Come and bid good-bye to Lady Windermere, and thank her for your charming visit. And, by the way, I must thank you for sending a card to Mr. Hopper—he's that rich young Australian people are taking such notice of just at present. His father made a great fortune by selling some kind of food in circular tins—most palatable, I believe—I fancy it is the thing the servants always refuse to eat. But the son is quite interesting. I think he's attracted by dear Agatha's clever talk. Of course, we would be very sorry to part with her, but I think that a mother who doesn't part with a daughter every season has no real affection, or no brains—which is worse. (LADY WINDERMERE *rings bell*) We're coming to-night, dear, so we'll see you again—and—remember my advice—take the poor fellow out of town at once; it is the only thing to do. Come, Agatha; good-bye again till to-night. (PARKER *opens door*; *exeunt* DUCHESS *and* LADY AGATHA C.; *exit* PARKER *closing doors*)

LADY W. How horrible! I understand now what Lord Darlington meant by the imaginary instance of the couple not two years married. Oh, it can't be true. She spoke of enormous sums of money paid to this woman. I know where Arthur keeps his bank book. I might find out by that. I *will* find out. (*crosses and opens drawer*) No, it is some hideous mistake (*rises and goes* C.), some silly scandal. He loves *me*. He loves *me*. But why should I not look? I have the right to look. I am his wife. (*returns to bureau; examines book, page by page—smiles, and gives a sigh of relief*) I knew it. There is not a word of truth in this stupid story. (*puts book back in the drawer; as she does so, starts and takes out another book*) A second book—private—locked. (*tries to open it, but fails; sees paper knife on bureau, and with it cuts cover from the book; begins to start at the first page*) Mrs. Erlynne—£600, Mrs. Erlynne—£700, Mrs. Erlynne—£400. Oh! It is true—it is true. How horrible! (*throws book on floor; rises*)

*Enter* LORD WINDERMERE R.

LORD W. Well, dear, has the fan been sent home yet? (*going* R.C.; *sees book*) Margaret (*picks it up*), you have cut

open my bank book. You have no right to do such a thing.

LADY W. You think it wrong that you are found out, don't you?

LORD W. I think it wrong that a wife should spy on her husband.

LADY W. I did not spy on you. I never knew of this woman's existence till half an hour ago. Someone who pitied me was kind enough to tell me what everyone in London knows already—your daily visits to Curzon Street, your mad infatuation, the monstrous sums of money you squander on this infamous woman. (*crosses* L.)

LORD W. Stop, Margaret—don't talk like that of Mrs. Erlynne, you don't know how unjust it is.

LADY W. (*turning to him*) You are very jealous of Mrs. Erlynne's honour. I wish you had been as jealous of mine.

LORD W. Your honour is untouched, Margaret. You don't think for a moment that——

LADY W. I think that you spend your money strangely. That is all—Oh, don't imagine I *mind* about the money. As far as I am concerned, you may squander everything we have. But what I *do* mind is that you who have loved me, you who have taught me to love you, should pass from the love that is given to the love that is bought. Oh, it's horrible! (*sits on sofa*) It is I who feel degraded—you don't feel anything. You can't realise how hideous the last six months seem to me now—every kiss you have given me is tainted in my memory.

LORD W. (*crossing to her*) Don't say that, Margaret—I have never loved anyone in the whole world but you.

LADY W. (*rises*) Who is this woman then? Why do you take a house for her.

LORD W. I did not take a house for her.

LADY W. You gave her the money to do it, which is the same thing.

LORD W. Margaret, as far as I have known Mrs. Erlynne——

LADY W. Is there a Mr. Erlynne—or is he a myth?

LORD W. Her husband died many years ago. She is alone in the world.

LADY W. (L.) Rather curious, isn't it?

LORD W. (L.C.) Margaret, I was saying to you, and I beg you to listen to me—that as far as I have known Mrs. Erlynne, she has conducted herself well. If years ago——

LADY W. Oh, (*crossing* R.) I don't want details about her life.

LORD W. (C.) I am not going to give you any details

about her life. I tell you simply this—Mrs. Erlynne was once honoured, loved, respected. She was well born, she had position, she lost everything—threw it away if you like. That makes it all the more bitter. Misfortunes one can endure—they come from outside, they are accidents. But to suffer for one's own fault—ah—there is the sting of life. It was twenty years ago too. She was little more than a girl then. She had been a wife for even less time than you have.

Lady W. I am not interested in her—and—you should not mention this woman and me in the same breath. It is an error of taste. (*sitting* R.)

Lord W. Margaret, you could save this woman—she wants to get back into Society, and she wants you to help her. (*crossing to her*)

Lady W. Me?

Lord W. Yes, you.

Lady W. How impertinent of her! (*a pause*)

Lord W. Margaret, I came to ask you a great favour, and I still ask it of you, though you have discovered what I had intended you should never have known, that I had given Mrs. Erlynne a large sum of money. I want you to send her an invitation for our party to-night. (*standing* L. *of her*)

Lady W. You are mad. (*rises*)

Lord W. I entreat you. People may chatter about her, do chatter about her, of course, but they don't know anything definite against her. She has been to several houses—not to houses where you would go, I admit, but still to houses where women who are in what is called Society nowadays do go. That does not content her. She wants you to receive her once.

Lady W. As a triumph for her, I suppose?

Lord W. No; but because she knows that you are a good woman, and that if she comes here once she will have a chance of a happier and securer life than she has had. She will make no further effort to know you. Won't you help a woman who is trying to get back?

Lady W. No! If a woman really repents she never wishes to return to the Society that has made or seen her ruin.

Lord W. I beg of you. (*moves* C.)

Lady W. I am going to dress for dinner; and don't mention this subject again this evening. (*goes* R.C.) Arthur, (*going to him* C.) you fancy because I have no father or mother, that I am alone in the world, and that you can treat me as you choose. You are wrong, I have friends—many friends.

LORD W. (C.) Margaret, you are talking foolishly, recklessly. I won't argue with you, but I insist upon your asking Mrs. Erlynne to-night.

LADY W. I shall do nothing of the kind. (*crossing* L.C.)

LORD W. You refuse? (C.)

LADY W. Absolutely.

LORD W. Ah, Margaret, do this for my sake—it is her last chance.

LADY W. What has that to do with me?

LORD W. How hard good women are!

LADY W. How weak bad men are!

LORD W. Margaret, none of us men may be good enough for the women we marry—that is quite true—but you don't imagine I would ever——oh the suggestion is monstrous!

LADY W. Why should *you* be different from other men? I am told that there is hardly a husband in London who does not waste his life over *some* shameful passion.

LORD W. I am not one of them.

LADY W. I am not so sure of that!

LORD W. You are sure in your heart. (*goes to her*) But don't make chasm after chasm between us. God knows, the last few minutes have thrust us wide enough apart Sit down and write the card.

LADY W. Nothing in the world would induce me.

LORD W (*crossing to bureau*) Then I will. (*rings bell, sits* R., *and writes note*)

LADY W. (L.) You are going to invite this woman?

LORD W. Yes. (*enter* PARKER C.) Parker.

PARKER. Yes, my lord? (*comes down* L.C.)

LORD W. Have this note sent round to Mrs. Erlynne at number 84A, Curzon-street. There is no answer. (*crossing and giving note to servant*) Send it at once.

*Exit* PARKER C.; *they face one another.*

LADY W. (C.) Arthur, if that woman comes to my house I shall insult her.

LORD W. (C.) Margaret, don't say that.

LADY W. I mean it.

LORD W. Child, if you did such a thing there's not a woman in London who wouldn't pity you.

LADY W. There is not a good woman in London who would not applaud me. We have been too lax. We must make an example. I propose to begin to-night. (*picking up fan*) Yes, you gave me this fan to-day—it was your birthday present. If that woman crosses my threshold I shall strike her across the face with it.

LORD W. (*crosses* L.) Margaret, you couldn't do such a thing.

LADY W. You don't know me. (*rings bell*; *enter* PARKER C.) Parker.

PARKER. Yes, my lady?

LADY W. I shall dine in my own room to-night—I don't want dinner, in fact. See that everything is ready by half past ten. And, Parker, be sure you pronounce the names of the guests very distinctly to-night. Sometimes you speak so fast that I miss them. I am particularly anxious to hear the names quite clearly, so as to make no mistake. You understand, Parker?

PARKER. Yes, my lady.

LADY W. And give me that fan. (PARKER *goes to table takes fan and gives it to* LADY WINDERMERE. LORD WINDERMERE *makes a gesture to stop him—then restrains himself*)

LADY W. That will do. (*exit* PARKER C.) (*speaking to* LORD WINDERMERE) If that woman comes here—I warn you——

LORD W. Margaret, you'll ruin us!

LADY W. Us! From this moment my life is separate from yours. But if you wish to avoid a public scandal write at once to this woman and tell her that *I forbid* her to come here.

LORD W. I will not—I cannot. She must come!

LADY W. Then I shall do exactly as I have said. (*crosses to door* R.) You leave me no choice. (*exit* R.)

LORD W. (*going to door*) Margaret! My God! What shall I do? I daren't tell her that this woman is her own mother.

CURTAIN.

## ACT II.

SCENE.—*Drawing-room in* LORD WINDERMERE'S *house ; style, Louis Seize ; white walls, pink and gold furniture ; door at back, opening on to staircase ; door* R.C., *opening on to terrace ; door* R.C., *opening into ball-room ; also a door leading into boudoir ; palm trees ; lamps, etc.*

*Discovered, the* DUCHESS *and* LADY AGATHA, *two guests ; also* LADY WINDERMERE.

DUCH. (*up* C.) So strange Lord Windermere isn't here. Mr. Hopper, too, is late. You have kept those five dances for him, Agatha ? (*coming down*)

LADY A. Yes, mamma. (*coming down and sitting on sofa*)

DUCH. (*sitting on sofa*) Just let me see your card. I'm glad Lady Windermere's revived cards. They're a mother's only safeguard. You dear simple little thing ! (*scratches out two names*) No nice girls should ever waltz with such particularly younger sons ! It looks so fast ! The last two dances you might pass on the terrace with Mr. Hopper.

LADY A. Yes, mamma.

DUCH. The air is so pleasant there.

*Enter* PARKER.

PARKER. Lord Plimdale, Mr. Charles Dumby, Mrs. Cowper-Cowper.

*Enter* L., PLIMDALE *and* DUMBY *with* MRS. COWPER-COWPER ; MRS. COWPER-COWPER *joins* LADY WINDERMERE ; PLIMDALE *shakes hands with* LADY WINDERMERE, L., *then goes up* R. *to back.*

DUMBY. Good evening, Lady Windermere. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season ? (*going* C.)

LADY W. (L.) I suppose so, Mr. Dumby. It's been a delightful season, hasn't it ?

DUMBY. Quite delightful ! Good evening, Duchess. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season ?

DUCH. I suppose so, Mr. Dumby. It has been a very dull season, hasn't it ?

DUMBY. Dreadfully dull, dreadfully dull !

MRS. C.-C. (*crossing to* DUMBY C.) Good evening, Mr. Dumby. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season ?

DUMBY. Oh, I think not. There'll probably be two more. (*goes up* C. *with* MRS. COWPER-COWPER)

PARKER. Mr. Hopper.

*Enter* HOPPER L.

HOPPER. How do you do, Lady Windermere? (*crossing* R.C.) How do you do, Duchess?

DUCH. Dear Mr. Hopper, how nice of you to come so early. We all know you are so run after in London.

HOPPER. Jolly place, London. They are not nearly so exclusive in London as they are in Sydney.

DUCH. (*on couch* L.) Ah! we know your value, Mr. Hopper. We wish there were more like you. It would make life so much easier. Do you know, Mr. Hopper, dear Agatha and I are so much interested in Australia. It must be so pretty with all the dear little kangaroos flying about. Agatha has found it on the map. What a curious shape! However, it is a very young country, isn't it?

HOPPER. Wasn't it made at the same time as the others, Duchess?

DUCH. How clever you are, Mr. Hopper! You have a cleverness quite of your own. But we mustn't keep you.

HOPPER. I should like to dance with Lady Agatha, Duchess.

DUCH. Well, I *hope* she has a dance left. Have you a dance left, Agatha?

AGATHA. Yes, mamma.

DUCH. The next one.

AGATHA. Yes, mamma.

HOPPER. May I have the pleasure?

DUCH. Mind you take great care of my little chatterbox. (*crossing* AGATHA *to him*; *then goes up* C. *and talks to* PLIMDALE *and* DUMBY R. *back*; *exeunt* LADY AGATHA *and* HOPPER R.U.E.; DUMBY *and* MRS. COWPER-COWPER *get down* R.)

*Enter* LORD WINDERMERE R. *back*.

LORD W. Margaret, I want to speak to you.

LADY W. In a moment. (*goes* R.)

PARKER. (*announcing*) Lord Augustus Lorton.

*Enter* LORD LORTON L.

DUCH. Lord Plimdale, will you take me into the ball-room? Augustus has been dining with us to-night, I really have had enough of him for the moment. (*exeunt* PLIMDALE *and* DUCHESS, R.U.E., MRS. COWPER-COWPER *and* DUMBY *go to* R. *chairs*)

PARKER. Lord Darlington.

*Enter* LORD DARLINGTON L.

LORD L. (*crossing to* WINDERMERE *who is* R.C.) I want to speak to you particularly, dear boy. Who is she? Where does she come from? Why hasn't she got any damned relations? Nuisance, relations. But they make one so respectable.

LORD W. You are talking of Mrs. Erlynne, I suppose? I only met her six months ago. Till then, I never knew of her existence.

LORD L. You have seen a good deal of her since then?

LORD W. (*coldly*) Yes, I have seen a good deal of her since then.

LORD L. Egad! the women are very down on her. I have been dining with Arabella this evening. By Jove! you should have heard what she said about Mrs. Erlynne. She didn't leave a rag on her. Berwick and I told her that didn't matter much, as the lady in question must have a very fine figure. You should have seen Arabella's expression? But I don't know what to do about Mrs. Erlynne. Egad! I might be married to her, she treats me with such indifference. She's deuced clever, too. She explains everything. Egad! she explains *you*. She has got any amount of explanations for you—and all of them different.

LORD W. No explanations are necessary about my friendship with Mrs. Erlynne.

LORD L. Hem! Well, look here, dear old fellow—do you think she will ever get into this damned thing called Society? Would you introduce her to your wife? No use beating about the bush. Would you do *that?*

LORD W. Mrs. Erlynne is coming here to-night!

LORD A. Your wife has sent her a card?

LORD W. Mrs. Erlynne has received a card.

LORD L. Then she's all right, dear boy. But why didn't you tell me that before? It would have saved me a heap of worry and misunderstandings! (*goes up stage*)

PARKER. Mr. Cecil Graham!

*Enter* MR. CECIL GRAHAM L.; AGATHA *and* HOPPER *cross stage.*

GRAHAM. (*shakes hands with* LADY WINDERMERE) Good evening, Arthur. (*crossing* R.C.) Why don't you ask me how I am? I like people who ask me how I am. It shows a widespread interest in my health. Now to-night I'm not all well. Been dining with my people. I wonder why it is one's people are always so tedious? My father would talk morality after dinner. I told him he was

old enough to know better. But my experience is that as soon as people are old enough to know better, they don't know anything at all. (LORD LORTON *strolls up to him*) Hullo, Tuppy! I hear you're going to be married again (WINDERMERE *goes up*); thought you were tired of that game (*brings him down* C.)

LORD L. You're excessively trivial, my dear boy, excessively trivial!

GRAHAM. And, by the way, Tuppy, which is it? (*moves* R.C. *with him*) Have you been twice married and once divorced, or twice divorced and once married? I say you've been twice divorced and once married. It seems so much more probable.

LORD L. I have a very bad memory; I really don't remember which. (*moves* R. *with* GRAHAM; *then strolls off* C.)

LORD W. Margaret! I *must* speak to you

LADY W. (*to* LORD DARLINGTON) Will you hold my fan for me, Lord Darlington? Thanks. (*goes down* L.)

LORD W. Margaret, what you said before dinner was, of course, impossible?

LADY W That woman is not coming here to-night!

LORD W. (L.C.) Mrs. Erlynne *is* coming here, and if you in any way annoy or wound her, you will bring shame and sorrow on us both. Remember that! Ah, Margaret, only trust me! A wife should trust her husband!

LADY W. (C.) London is full of women who trust their husbands. You can always recognise them. They look so thoroughly unhappy. I am not going to be one of them. (*moves up*; LORD WINDERMERE *crosses* R.; LORD DARLINGTON *comes down* R. *of* LADY WINDERMERE; *exit* AGATHA *and* HOPPER L.) Lord Darlington, will you give me back my fan, please? Thanks.

LORD W. (*aside*) I must tell her that this woman is her own mother. It would be a terrible thing if anything were to happen here.

LADY W. I want a friend to-night, Lord Darlington. I didn't know I should want one so soon.

LORD D. Lady Windermere, I knew the time would come some day; but why to-night?

LORD W. (*aside* R.) I *shall* tell her!

PARKER. Mrs. Erlynne!

LORD WINDERMERE *starts*; MRS. ERLYNNE *enters* L., *very beautifully dressed and very dignified*; LADY WINDERMERE *clutches at her fan, then lets it drop on the floor*; *she bows coldly to* MRS. ERLYNNE, *who bows to her sweetly, and sails into the room.*

MRS. E. (*crossing* C.) How do you do, Lord Windermere?
LORD D. You have dropped your fan, Lady Windermere. (*picks it up and hands it to her*)
MRS. E. (C.) How charming your wife looks to-night—quite a picture!
LORD W. (*in a low voice*) How rash of you to come!
MRS. E. (*smiling*) It was the wisest thing I ever did in my life. And, by the way, you must pay me a good deal of attention this evening. I am afraid of the women. You must introduce me to some of them. The men I can always manage. (LORD WINDERMERE *goes up and watches* MRS. ERLYNNE; *to* LORD AUGUSTUS LORTON, *who is* R.) How do you do, Lord Augustus? You have quite neglected me lately. I have not seen you since yesterday! I am afraid you're faithless. Everyone told me so.
LORD L. (R.) Now really, Mrs. Erlynne, let me explain!
MRS. E. (R.C.) No, dear Lord Augustus, you can't explain anything. It is your chief charm.
LORD L. Ah! if you find charms in me, Mrs. Erlynne!
LORD D. (*to* LADY WINDERMERE) How pale you are. Come out on the terrace.
LADY W. Cowards are always pale.
LORD D. Come out on the terrace.
LADY W. If you wish it (*to* PARKER *who is standing* L.) Parker, send my cloak out.

*Enter* LADY JEDBURGH *and* GRAHAM.

MRS. E. (*crossing to* LADY WINDERMERE) Lady Windermere, how beautifully your terrace is illuminated. Reminds me of Prince Dorian's at Rome. (LADY WINDERMERE *bows coldly and goes off with* LORD DARLINGTON; LORD AUGUSTUS LORTON *sits in armchair at fire. After watching them off*) Oh, how do you do, Mr Graham? Isn't that Lady Jedburgh? I should so much like to know her.
GRAHAM. Oh, certainly, if you wish it. Aunt Emily, allow me to introduce Mrs Erlynne. (*he goes up* C. *to* DUMBY)
MRS. E. So pleased to meet you, Lady Jedburgh. (*sits on couch*) Your nephew and I are great friends. I am so much interested in his political career. I think he's sure to be a political success; he thinks like a Tory and talks like a Radical, and that's so important nowadays. He's such a *brilliant* talker, too. But we all know from whom he inherits that. Lord Allandale was saying to me only yesterday in the Park, that Mr. Graham talks almost as well as his aunt.
LADY J. Most kind of you to say these charming things to me!

DUMBY. (*up* L.C.) Did *you* introduce Mrs. Erlynne to Lady Jedburgh?

GRAHAM. Had to, my dear fellow. Couldn't help it!

DUMBY. Hope she won't speak to me! (*then exits* R. *and re-enters with* LADY PLIMDALE)

MRS. E. (C., *to* LADY JEDBURGH) On Wednesday? With great pleasure. (GRAHAM *comes down to* LADY JEDBURGH *and exits with her* R.U.E. *To* LORD WINDERMERE *who is* C.) What a bore it is to have to be civil to these old dowagers! But they always insist on it! (*goes up* L.)

LADY P. (R., *near fire*) Who is that well-dressed woman talking to Windermere?

DUMBY. I haven't the slightest idea. Looks like an *edition de luxe* of a wicked French novel, meant specially for the English market.

MRS. E. Is that Dumby talking to Lady Plimdale? I hear she is frightfully jealous of him. He doesn't seem anxious to speak to me to-night. (*crossing* C.) I think I'll dance with you first, Windermere. It will make Lord Augustus so jealous! Lord Augustus! (LORD AUGUSTUS, *who has been speaking to* DUMBY *and* LADY PLIMDALE, *comes down* C. *from* R.) Lord Windermere insists on my dancing with him first, and, as it's his own house, I can't well refuse. You know I would much sooner dance with you.

LORD L. (C.) I wish I could think so, Mrs. Erlynne.

MRS. E. (C.) You know it far too well. I can fancy a person dancing through life with you and finding it charming.

LORD L. Oh, thank you, thank you. You are the most adorable of ladies!

MRS. E. What a nice speech—so simple and so sincere! You shall hold my bouquet for me. (*goes across stage towards ball-room* R.U.E., *on* LORD WINDERMERE'S *arm*) Ah, Mr. Dumby! How are you? I am so sorry to have been out the last three times you have called. Come and lunch on Friday.

DUMBY. Delighted!

LORD AUGUSTUS LORTON *follows* MRS. ERLYNNE *and* LORD WINDERMERE *off* R.U.E., *holding* MRS. ERLYNNE'S *bouquet.*

LADY P. What an absolute brute you are! (*crosses to* C.) I can never believe a word you say! Why did you tell me you didn't know her? (*sitting on sofa*) What do you mean by calling on her three times running? You are not to go to lunch there; of course you understand that?

DUMBY. (R.C.) I wouldn't dream of going!

LADY P. You haven't told me her name yet! Who is she?

DUMBY. She's a Mrs. Erlynne.

LADY P. (*moves up stage* C.) *That* woman! How very interesting! How intensely interesting! I really must have a good stare at her. I have heard the most shocking things about her. They say she is ruining poor Windermere. And Lady Windermere, who goes in for being so proper, invites her! How extremely amusing! (*comes back and sits on ottoman*) You *are* to lunch there on Friday!

DUMBY. Why?

LADY P. Because I want you to take my husband with you. He has been so attentive lately that he has become a perfect nuisance. Now this woman is just the thing for him. He'll dance attendance on her as long as she'll let him, and won't bother me. I assure you, women of that kind are most useful. *They* form the *basis* of other people's marriages.

DUMBY. What a mystery you are!

LADY P. (*rising and going up* C.) I wish *you* were!

DUMBY. I am—to myself. I am the only person in the world I should like to know thoroughly: I don't see any chance of it at present.

LADY P. I must have another look at her. (*she beckons* DUMBY, *who follows her off* R.U.E.)

*First waltz heard off; stage quite clear for a few seconds. Enter* LADY WINDERMERE *and* LORD DARLINGTON *from terrace* L.C.

LORD D. Her coming here is shameful.

LADY W. (C.) Yes; I know now what you meant to-day at tea time. Why didn't you tell me right out? You should have.

LORD D. (L. *of her*) I couldn't! A man can't tell these things about another man! But if I had known he was going to make you ask her here to-night I think I would have told you. You would have been spared that insult at any rate. (*goes* L.C.)

LADY W. I did not ask her. He insisted on her coming—against my entreaties—against my commands. I feel that every woman sneers at me as she dances with my husband. What have I done to deserve this? I gave him all my life. (*goes* R.) He took it, used it, spoiled it! I am degraded in my own eyes; and I lack courage—I am a coward! (*sits on ottoman* C.)

LORD D. (*sitting* L. *of her*) If I know you at all, I know that you can't live with a man who treats you like this. What sort of life would you have with him? You would feel that he was lying to you every moment of the day. You

would feel that the look in his eyes was false, his voice false, his touch false, his passion false. He would come to you when he was weary of others; you would have to comfort him. He would come to you when he was devoted to others; you would have to charm him. You would have to be to him the mask of his real life.

LADY W. You are right. But where am I to turn to? You said you would be my friend, Lord Darlington. What am I to do?

LORD D. Between men and women there is no friendship possible. There is passion, enmity, love, but no friendship. I love you——

LADY W. No—no! (*rises*)

LORD D. (*rising*) Yes, I love you! You are more to me than anything in the whole world. What does your husband give you? Nothing. I offer you my life——

LADY W. Lord Darlington——

LORD D. My life, my whole life. Take it, and do with it what you will—I love you—love you as I have never loved any living thing. From the moment I met you I worshipped you—worshipped you blindly, adoringly, madly! You did not know it then—you know it now! Leave this house to-night. I won't tell you that the world matters nothing, or the world's voice, or the voice of Society. They matter a great deal. They matter too much. But there are moments when one has to choose between living one's own life, fully, entirely, completely—or dragging out some false, shallow, degrading existence. *You* have that moment now. Choose!

LADY W. I've not the courage. (*crossing* L.)

LORD D. (*following her*) Yes, you have the courage. There may be six months of pain, of disgrace even, but when you no longer bear his name, when you bear mine, all will be well then. Margaret, my love, my wife that will be some day—yes, my wife! You know it! What are you now? This woman has the place that belongs by right to you. Oh, go—go out of this house, with head erect, with a smile upon your lips, with courage in your eyes. All London will know why you did it; and who will blame you? No one! If they do, what matter? Wrong? What *is* wrong? It's wrong for a man to abandon his wife for a shameless woman. It is wrong for a wife to remain with a man who so dishonours her. You said once you would make no compromise with things. Make none now. Oh, come out of this house. Be brave! Be yourself!

LADY W. I am afraid of being myself. Let me think. (*crossing* R.) Let me wait. My husband may return to me.

LORD D. (C.) And you would take him back! You are not what I thought you were. You are just the same as every other woman. You will stand anything rather than face the censure of a world whose praise you would despise. You are right. You have no courage, none!

LADY W. Ah, give me time to think. I cannot answer you now.

LORD W. It must be now or not at all.

LADY W. Then—not at all!

LORD D. You break my heart.

LADY W. Mine is already broken!

LORD D. To-morrow morning I leave England. You will never see me again. This is the last time I shall ever look on you. For one moment our lives met—our souls touched. They must never meet or touch again. Good-bye. (*exit* L.)

LADY W. How alone I am in life! How perfectly alone! (*goes* L.C.)

*First waltz stops*; LADY WINDERMERE *sits on settee* L.C.; *enter* DUCHESS R.U.E., *laughing and talking, preceded by a few guests who come on from ball-room.*

DUCH. (C.) Dear Margaret, I've just been having such a delightful chat with Mrs. Erlynne. I am so sorry for what I said to you this afternoon about her. Of course, she must be all right if *you* invite her! A most attractive woman! Can't imagine why people speak against her. It's those horrid nieces of mine—the Saville girls—they're always talking scandal. Still, I should go to Homburg, dear, I really should. (*enter* HOPPER *and* AGATHA L.U.E.) She is just a little too attractive. But where is Agatha? Oh! here she is! Mr. Hopper, I am very, very angry with you. You have taken Agatha out on the terrace, and she is so delicate! (LADY WINDERMERE *rises and crosses* R.)

HOPPER. (L.) Awfully sorry, Duchess. We went out for a moment and then got chatting together.

DUCH. (*sitting on sofa*) Ah, about dear Australia, I suppose.

HOPPER. (C.) Yes.

DUCH. (*aside to* AGATHA) Agatha darling?

AGATHA. (C.) Yes, mamma!

DUCH. Did Mr. Hopper definitely——

AGATHA. Yes, mamma.

DUCH. And what answer did you give him, dear child?

AGATHA. Yes; mamma!

DUCH. (*rising*) My dear one! You always say the right thing. Mr. Hopper! James! Agatha has told me everything. How cleverly you have both kept your secret!

HOPPER. You don't mind my taking Agatha off to Australia, then, Duchess?

DUCH. To Australia? Oh, don't mention that dreadful, vulgar place.

HOPPER. She said she'd like to come with me.

DUCH. (*looks enquiringly at* LADY AGATHA) Did you say that, Agatha?

AGATHA. Yes, mamma.

DUCH. Agatha, you say the most silly things possible. I think on the whole that Grosvenor Square would be a more healthy place to reside in. There are lots of vulgar people live in Grosvenor Square, but, at any rate, there are no horrid kangaroos crawling about. But we will talk about this to-morrow. You will come to lunch, James, of course. Perhaps you had better come at half past one instead of two. You could have a nice long half hour with the Duke.

HOPPER. Should like it awfully, Duchess. The Duke has never said a word to me yet.

DUCH. I think he'll have a good deal to say to you to-morrow. (*crosses* R.C. *to* LADY WINDERMERE) Good-night, dear. James, you can take Agatha down. (*exeunt* HOPPER *and* AGATHA L.) I'm afraid it's the old, old story. Love at the end of the season! (*exit* L.)

*Enter* DUMBY, LADY PLIMDALE, GRAHAM, *and* LADY JEDBURGH, R.U.E.

LADY P. (*coming to* LADY WINDERMERE *and crossing* L. *with her*) My dear Margaret, what a handsome woman your husband has been dancing with. I should be quite jealous! Is she a *great* friend of yours?

LADY W. No! This is the first time I have ever met her.

LADY P. Really? (*laughs*) Good night! (*exit* L.)

*Second waltz heard off*; LADY WINDERMERE *goes up stage* L.C.

DUMBY. (*standing up* R.) What awful manners young Hopper has.

GRAHAM. Ah! Hopper is one of Nature's gentlemen, the worst type of gentleman I know.

DUMBY. Sensible woman, Lady Windermere. Lots of wives would have objected to Mrs. Erlynne coming here. But Lady Windermere has that uncommon thing called common sense. (*they go and talk to* LADY WINDERMERE, *up* R., *at door of ball-room*)

LADY J. Good night, Lady Windermere. What a fascinating woman Mrs. Erlynne is—my nephew introduced her.

Good-night; come along, dear. (*exeunt* LADY JEDBURGH *and* CECIL GRAHAM L.)

*Enter* MRS. ERLYNNE *and* LORD WINDERMERE R.U.E.

MRS. E. What a charming ball it has been! Quite reminds me of old days. (*sits on sofa* L.C.) I see that there are just as many fools in Society as there used to be. So pleased to find that nothing has altered. Except Margaret; she's grown quite pretty. The last time I saw her, twenty years ago, she was a fright in flannel. By the way, Lord Augustus is to call to-morrow at twelve o'clock. He wanted to propose to-night. In fact he did. He kept on proposing. Poor Augustus, you know how he repeats himself. Such a bad habit! Of course I am going to take him. Of course you must help me in this matter.

LORD W. I am not called on to encourage Lord Augustus, I suppose?

MRS. E. Oh, no! I do the encouraging, but you will make me a handsome settlement, Windermere, won't you?

LORD W. Is that what you want to talk to me about to-night?

MRS. E. Yes.

LORD W. Talk to me about that to-morrow. Won't to-morrow do as well?

MRS. E. No. To-morrow I am going to accept him; and I think it would be a good thing if I was able to tell him that I had—well, well, what shall we say?—£2,000 a year left to me by a rich aunt—or a second husband—or some relative of that kind. £2,000? £2,500, I think. Nowadays margin is everything. (*crossing* L C.) Windermere, don't you think the world an intensely amusing place? I do! (*they exeunt* L.U.E.; DUMBY *exits* L.)

LADY W. Oh, that shameless woman! To stay in this house any longer is impossible. To-night, a man who loves me offered me his whole life I refused it. It was foolish of me. I will offer him mine now. I will give him mine. I will go to him. (*goes to the door and turns back; sits down at table and writes a letter, puts it into an envelope, and leaves it on table*) Arthur has never understood me. When he reads this, he will. He may do as he chooses now with *his* life. I have done with *mine* as I think best, as I think right. (*exit* L.)

*Second waltz stops;* PARKER *enters and music stops; he lowers lights; enter* MRS. ERLYNNE.

MRS. E. Is Lady Windermere in the ball-room.

PARKER. Her ladyship has just gone out, madam.
MRS. E. Gone out !
PARKER. Yes, madam.
MRS. E. She's not on the terrace.
PARKER. No, madam. Her ladyship has just gone out of the house, madam.
MRS. E. Out of the house !
PARKER. Yes, madam. Her ladyship told me she had left a letter for his lordship on the table.
MRS. E. Thank you. (*exit* PARKER R.U.E.)
MRS. E. Gone out of the house ! A letter addressed to her husband ! (*takes up letter*) No, no ! It would be impossible. (*sits*) Life doesn't repeat its tragedies like that. Oh ! why does this horrible fancy come across me ? Why do I remember now the one moment of my life I most wish to forget ? *Does* life repeat its tragedies ? (*opens letter*) Oh, how terrible ! (*sinks into a chair*) The same words that twenty years ago I wrote to her father ; and how bitterly I have been punished for it ! No ; my punishment is to-night —is now ! (*still seated* R.)

*Enter* LORD WINDERMERE L.U.E.

LORD W. (*coming* C ) Have you said "Good-night" to my wife ?
MRS. E. (*crushing letter in her hand*) Yes. (*hides letter under her fan*)
LORD W. Where is she ?
MRS. E. Oh, she is very tired. She has gone to bed. She said she had a headache.
LORD W. I must go to her. (*moves* L.C.) You'll excuse me ?
MRS. E. (*rising and going* R.C.) Oh, no ! It's nothing serious. She's only very tired, that is all. Besides, there are people still in the supper room. She wants you to make her apologies to them. She said she didn't wish to be disturbed. (*drops letter*) She asked me to tell you.
LORD W. (*picks up letter*) But you have dropped something.
MRS. E. Oh, yes, thank you ; that is mine. (*takes it*)
LORD W. But it's my wife's handwriting, isn't it ?
MRS. E. Yes ; it's—an address Will you ask them to call my carriage, please ?
LORD W. Certainly. (*goes* L. *and exit*)
MRS. E. What can I do ? What can I do ? I feel a passion awakening within me that I never felt before. What can it mean ? The daughter must not be like the mother—that would be terrible. How can I save her ? A moment may ruin a life. Who knows that better than I ? Windermere

must be got out of the house, that is absolutely necessary. (*goes up*) But how shall I do it? It must be done somehow. (*goes* R.)

*Enter* LORD AUGUSTUS R.U.E., *carrying bouquet.*

LORD L. Dear lady, I am in such suspense! I haven't had a single dance with you. (L.C.)

MRS. E. (R.C.) Lord Augustus, listen to me. You are to take Lord Windermere down to your club to-night, at once. Keep him there as long as possible.

LORD L. (C.) But you said you wished me to keep early hours!

MRS. E. Do what I tell you!

LORD L. And my reward?

MRS. E. Oh! ask me that to-morrow, but don't let Windermere out of your sight to-night. If you do I will never forgive you. I will never speak to you again. I'll have nothing to do with you. Remember, you are to keep Windermere at your club. And don't let him come back to-night. (*exit* C.; LORD AUGUSTUS *rushes after her, meets* PARKER *in door, drops flowers and exits*; PARKER *picks them up and goes off*)

VERY QUICK CURTAIN.

## ACT III.

SCENE.—*Library of* LORD DARLINGTON'S *house; room Oriental and luxurious; Chesterfield couch in front of fire; lamps lit.*

LADY W. (*standing by the fireplace*) Why doesn't he come? Why is not he here; to wake by passionate words some fire within me? I am cold—cold as a loveless thing—Arthur must have read my letter by this time. If he cared for me he would have come after me—would have taken me back by force. But he doesn't care. He's entrammelled by this woman—fascinated by her—dominated by her. If a woman wants to hold a man she has merely to appeal to what is worst in him. *We* make gods of men and they leave us. *Others* make brutes of them and they fawn and are faithful. How hideous life is! (*goes* C.) And will *he* love me always, this man to whom I am giving my life? What do I bring him? Lips that have lost the note of joy, eyes that are blinded by tears. I bring him nothing. I must go back—(*moves up* L.C.) I can't go back. My letter has put me in their power. Arthur would not take me back! That fatal letter! No! Lord Darlington leaves England to-morrow. I will go with him—I have no choice. No! No! I will go back and let Arthur do with me what he pleases. I can't wait here. It has been madness my coming. (*goes up* L.C.) As for Lord Darlington——(*enter* MRS. ERLYNNE L.) Mrs. Erlynne!

MRS. E. Lady Windermere. (*goes* C.) Thank heaven I am in time. You must go back to your husband's house at once.

LADY W. Must!

MRS. E. (*authoritatively*) Yes, you must! There is not a second to be lost. Lord Darlington may return at any moment.

LADY W. Don't come near me.

MRS. E. You are on the brink of ruin, you must leave this place. My carriage is waiting at the corner of the street. (LADY WINDERMERE *takes off her cloak and puts it on sofa*) What are you doing?

LADY W. (R.C.) Mrs. Erlynne—if you had not come here I would have gone back. But now that I see you I feel that nothing in the whole world would induce me to live under the same roof as Lord Windermere. You fill me

with *horror*. There is something about you that stirs the wildest—*rage* within me. And I know why you are here. My husband sent you to lure me back that I might serve as a blind to whatever relations exist between you and him.

MRS. E. (C.) Oh! You don't think that—you can't.

LADY W. Go back to my husband! He belongs to you and not to me. I suppose he is afraid of a scandal? Men are such cowards. But he had better prepare himself. He shall *have* a scandal. He shall have the worst scandal there has been in London for years. Had he come himself I admit I would have gone back to the life of degradation you and he had prepared for me—I was going back—but to stay himself at home and to send you as his messenger—Oh, it was infamous, infamous! (*going to fireplace*)

MRS. E. (C) Lady Windermere, you wrong me horribly—you wrong your husband horribly. He doesn't know you are here—he thinks you are safe in your own house. He thinks you are asleep in your own room. He never read the mad letter you wrote to him!

LADY W. (R.) Never read it?

MRS. E No; he knows nothing about it. (C.)

LADY W. How simple you think me. (*going to her*) You are lying to me.

MRS. E. (C.) I am not. I am telling you the truth.

LADY W. (*goes* L.) If my husband didn't read the letter how is it that you are here? Who *told* you I had left the house you were shameless enough to enter? Who told you where I had gone to? My husband told you, and sent you to decoy me back.

MRS. E. Your husband has never seen the letter. I—saw it—I opened it. I—read it.

LADY W. (*turning to her*) You opened a letter of mine to my husband. You wouldn't dare.

MRS. E. Dare! Oh, to save you from the abyss into which you are falling there is nothing in the world I would not dare—nothing in the whole world. Here is the letter. Your husband has never read it. He never shall read it. (*going to fireplace*) It should never have been written. (*tears it and throws it into the fire*)

LADY W. How do I know that that was my letter after all? You seem to think that the simplest device can take me in.

MRS. E. (*coming* C.) Oh! Why do you disbelieve everything I tell you? What object do you think I have in coming here, except to save you from utter ruin, to save you from the consequence of a hideous mistake? That letter that is burnt now *was* your letter. Oh!—I swear it to you.

LADY W. (*slowly*) You took good care to burn it before I had examined it. I cannot trust you. You, whose whole life is a lie.

MRS. E. Think as you like about me. But there is not a moment to lose. You must go back to the husband you love.

LADY W. I do *not* love him.

MRS. E. You do ; and you know that he loves you.

LADY W. (L.) He does not understand what love is. He understands it as little as you do—but I see what you want. It would be a great advantage to you to get me back. Dear Heaven ! what a life I would have then. Living at the mercy of a woman who has neither mercy nor pity in her, a woman whom it is an infamy to meet, a degradation to know—a vile woman—a woman who comes between husband and wife !

MRS. E. (C.) Lady Windermere, don't say such terrible things. You don't know how terrible they are—how terrible and how unjust. (LADY WINDERMERE *sits* L.C.) Listen. You must listen ! Only go back to your husband, and I promise never to communicate with him again on any pretext—never to see him—never to have anything to do with his life or yours. The money that he gave me, he gave me not through love but through hatred ; not in worship but in contempt. The hold I have over him——

LADY W. Ah ! You admit you have a hold !

MRS. E. (C.) Yes, and I will tell you what it is. It is his love for you, Lady Windermere.

LADY W. You expect me to believe that ?

MRS. E. You must believe it ! It is true. It is his love for you that has made him submit to—oh ! call it what you like—tyranny, threats, anything you choose. But it is his love for you. His desire to spare you—shame, yes, shame and disgrace..

LADY W. What do you mean ? You are insolent ! What have I to do with you ?

MRS. E. Nothing. I know it. But I tell you that your husband loves you—that you may never meet with such love again in your whole life—that such love you will never meet—and that if you throw it away the day may come when you will starve for love, and it will not be given to you ; beg for love and it will be denied you. Oh ! Arthur loves you !

LADY W. Arthur ? And you tell me there is nothing between you ?

MRS. E. Lady Windermere, before Heaven your husband is guiltless of all offence towards you. And I tell you that had it ever occurred to me that such a monstrous suspicion

would have entered your mind I would have died rather than have crossed your life or his—Oh! died, gladly died. (*moves to sofa* R.)

LADY W. You talk as if you had a heart. Women like you have no hearts. (*sits* L.C.)

MRS. E. Believe what you choose about me—I'm not worth a moment's sorrow. But don't spoil your beautiful young life on my account! You don't know what may be in store for you unless you leave this house at once. You don't know what it is to lose one's life, to be despised, mocked, abandoned, sneered at—to be an outcast! to hear the laughter, the horrible laughter of the world, a thing more bitter than all the tears the world has ever shed. You don't know what it is. One pays for one's sin, and then one pays again, and all one's life one pays. You must never know that. As for me, if suffering be an expiation, then at this moment I have expiated all my faults, whatever they have been; for to-night you have made a heart in one who had it not, made it and broken it. But let that pass. (*goes* R.) I may have wrecked my own life, but I will not let you wreck yours. You—why you are a mere girl, you would be lost. You haven't got the kind of brains that enables a woman to get back. You have neither the wit nor the courage. You couldn't stand dishonour. No! Go back, Lady Windermere, to the husband who loves you, whom you love. Go back, Lady Windermere, to the child who, even now, in pain or joy may be calling to you. (LADY WINDERMERE *rises*) God gave you that child. He will require from you that you make his life fine, that you watch over him. What answer will you make to God if his life is ruined, through you? Back to your home Lady Windermere—your husband loves you! He has never swerved for a moment from the love he bears you. But even if he had a thousand loves you must stay with your child. If he ill-treated you you must stay with your child. If he abandoned you your place is with your child. (LADY WINDERMERE *sinks into chair* L., *with her face in her hands; rushing to her*) Lady Windermere!

LADY W. (*rising*) Take me home.

MRS. E. Come! Where is your cloak? (*getting it from sofa*) Here, put it on. Come at once! (*they go to door*)

LADY W. Stop! Don't you hear voices?

MRS. E. No! No! There is no one!

LADY W. Yes, there is! Listen! Oh, that is my husband's voice! He is coming in! Save me! Oh! It's some plot. You have sent for him.

MRS. E. Silence! I'm here to save you, if I can. But I

fear it is too late! There! (*pointing to curtain of* C. *window*) The first chance you have, slip out—if you ever get a chance!

LADY W. (*going behind curtain*) But you?

MRS. E. I'll face them.

LORD L. (*outside*) Nonsense, dear Windermere, you must come in.

MRS. E. Lord Augustus! Then 'tis I, too, who am lost! (*exit* R.)

*Enter* LORD DARLINGTON, MR. DUMBY, LORD WINDERMERE, LORD AUGUSTUS LORTON, *and* MR. CECIL GRAHAM; *they put their hats and coats on chairs and table* L.C.

DUMBY. (*crossing to chair* R.C.) What a nuisance their turning us out of the club at this hour. It's only two o'clock. (*sinks into chair near fire*) The lively part of the evening is only just beginning. (*yawns and closes his eyes*)

LORD W. It is very good of you, Lord Darlington, asking us in, but I'm afraid I can't stay long.

LORD D. Really. I am so sorry. You'll take a cigar, won't you?

LORD W. Thanks. (*sits* L.)

LORD L. My dear boy, you must not dream of going. I have a great deal to talk to you about, of great importance too.

GRAHAM. Oh, we all know what that is. Tuppy can't talk about anything but Mrs. Erlynne. (*standing by table* C.)

LORD W. Well, that is no business of yours, is it, Cecil?

GRAHAM. None. That is why it interests me. My own business always bores me to death. I prefer other people's.

LORD D. Have something to drink, you fellows. Cecil, you'll have a whisky and soda?

GRAHAM. Thanks. (*goes to table with* LORD DARLINGTON) Mrs. Erlynne looked very handsome to-night. Didn't she?

LORD D. I daresay. I am not one of her admirers.

GRAHAM. I usen't to be, but I am now. Why, she actually made me introduce her to poor dear Aunt Emily. I believe she is going to lunch there.

LORD D. No?

GRAHAM. She is, really.

LORD D. Excuse me, you fellows. I'm going away to-morrow, and I have to write a few letters. (*crossing* R.)

DUMBY. Clever woman, Mrs. Erlynne.

GRAHAM. Hallo, Dumby! I thought you were asleep.

DUMBY. I am, I usually am.

LORD L. A very clever woman. She knows perfectly wel what a fool I am—knows it as well as I do myself. (GRAHAM

*comes down* R. *and laughs*) Ah, you may laugh, my boy, but it is a great thing to come across a woman who thoroughly understands one.

DUMBY. It is a dangerous thing. They always end by marrying one.

GRAHAM. (*going down to him*) But I thought, Tuppy, you were never going to see her again. You told me so yesterday evening at the Club. You said you heard——(*whispering to him*)

LORD L. Oh, she's explained that.

GRAHAM. And the Wiesbaden affair?

LORD L. She's explained that too.

DUMBY. And her income, Tuppy? Has she explained that?

LORD L. She's going to explain that to-morrow.

DUMBY. Awfully commercial, women nowadays. Only throw their caps over mills that can raise the wind for them.

LORD L. You want to make her out a wicked woman? She is not

GRAHAM. (*at table* C.) Oh!—wicked women bother one. Good women bore one That is the only difference between them.

LORD L. Mrs. Erlynne has a future before her.

DUMBY. Mrs. Erlynne has a past before her.

LORD L. I prefer women with a past. They're always so amusing to talk to.

GRAHAM. Well, you'll have lots of topics of conversation with *her*.

LORD L. My dear boy, if I wasn't the most good-natured man in London——

GRAHAM. We'd treat you with more respect, wouldn't we, Tuppy?

DUMBY. The youths of the present day are quite monstrous. They have absolutely no respect for dyed hair.

GRAHAM. Mrs. Erlynne has a great respect for dear Tuppy.

LORD W. Cecil, you let your tongue run away with you. You must leave Mrs. Erlynne alone. You don't really know anything about her at all, and you are always talking scandal against her.

GRAHAM. (*coming down* L. *of him*) My dear Arthur, I never talk scandal. *I* only talk gossip.

LORD W. What's the difference between scandal and gossip?

GRAHAM. (*down* L.) Gossip is charming. History is merely gossip. But scandal is gossip made tedious by morality. Now, I never moralise. *A man* who moralises is usually a hypocrite, and a *woman* who moralises is invariably plain. There is

nothing in the whole world so unbecoming to a woman as a Nonconformist conscience. And most women know it, I am glad to say.

LORD L. Just my sentiments.

GRAHAM. (*crosses to back of table*) Sorry to hear it, Tuppy. Whenever people agree with me I feel I must be wrong.

LORD L. My dear boy, when I was your age——

GRAHAM. But you never were, Tuppy, and you never will be. (*going up* C.) I say, Darlington, let us have some cards. You'll play, Arthur, won't you?

LORD. W. No, thanks, Cecil.

DUMBY. Good heavens! How marriage ruins a man! It's as demoralising as cigarettes, and far more expensive. You'll play, of course, Tuppy?

LORD L. (*pouring himself out a brandy and soda at table*) Can't, dear boy. Promised Mrs. Erlynne never to play cards or drink again. (*drinks his brandy and soda*)

GRAHAM. No, my dear Tuppy; don't be led astray into the paths of virtue. Reformed, you would be perfectly tedious. That is the worst of women. They always want one to be good. And if we are good when they meet us, they don't love us at all. They like to find us quite irretrievably bad, and to leave us quite hopelessly good. (*goes up* C.)

LORD D. They always do find us bad. (*seated at* C. *table*)

DUMBY. I don't think we are bad. We are all good, except Tuppy.

LORD D. No, we are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.

DUMBY. Upon my word you are very romantic to-night, Darlington.

GRAHAM. *Too* romantic. You must be in love! Who is the girl?

LORD D. The woman I love is not free—or thinks she isn't.

GRAHAM. (*sitting on table* C.) A married woman, then! There's nothing in the world like the devotion of a married woman—it's a thing no married man knows anything about.

LORD D. Oh! she doesn't love me. She is a good woman. She is the only good woman I have ever met in my life.

GRAHAM. The only good woman you have ever met in your life?

LORD D. Yes.

GRAHAM. Well, you *are* a lucky fellow. Why, I have met hundreds of good women. I never seem to meet any but good women. The world is perfectly packed with good women. To know them is a middle-class education.

LORD D. This woman has purity and innocence. She has everything we men have lost.

GRAHAM: My dear fellow, what on earth should we men do with purity and innocence? A carefully thought-out button-hole is much more effective.

DUMBY. She doesn't really love you then?

LORD D. No, she does not.

DUMBY. I congratulate you, my dear fellow. In this world there are only two tragedies. One is *not* getting what one wants, and the other is getting it. The last is much the worst; the last is the real tragedy! How long could you love a woman who didn't love you, Cecil?

GRAHAM. A woman who didn't love me? Oh, all my life.

DUMBY. So could I. But its so difficult to meet one.

LORD D. (*still seated* L.C.) How can you be so conceited, Dumby?

DUMBY. I didn't say it as a matter of conceit. I said it as a matter of regret. I have been wildly, madly adored. I am sorry I have been. It has been an immense nuisance. I should like to be allowed a little time to myself now and then.

LORD L. Time to educate yourself, I suppose?

DUMBY. No, time to forget all I have learned. That is much more important.

LORD D. Ah, what cynics you fellows are!

GRAHAM. What is a cynic? (*sitting on back of sofa*)

LORD D. A man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing.

GRAHAM. And a sentimentalist, my dear Darlington, is a man who sees an absurd value in everything, and doesn't know the market value of anything. (*crosses to fireplace*)

LORD D. You always amuse me, Cecil. You talk as if you were a man of experience.

GRAHAM. (*front of fireplace*) I am.

LORD D. You are far too young.

GRAHAM. That is a great error. Experience is a question (*goes in front of sofa*) of instinct about life. I have got it. Tuppy hasn't. Experience is the name Tuppy gives to his mistakes. That is all.

DUMBY. Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes.

GRAHAM. (*sitting on sofa*) One shouldn't commit any. (*sees* LADY WINDERMERE'S *fan on the sofa*)

DUMBY. Life would be very dull without them.

GRAHAM. Of course you are quite faithful to this woman you are in love with—this good woman?

LORD D. (*rising and going* R.C.) Cecil, if one really loves a woman all other women in the world become absolutely meaningless to one. Love changes one—*I* am changed.

GRAHAM. Dear me, how very interesting! Tuppy! I want to talk to you.

DUMBY. It's no use talking to Tuppy. You might as well talk to a brick wall.

GRAHAM. I like talking to a brick wall. It's the only thing in the world that never contradicts one. Tuppy!

LORD L. What is it? What is it?

GRAHAM. Come over here. I want you.

LORD L. (*rising and going to him* R.C.) Well, what is it? What is it? (LORD WINDERMERE *rises and goes for his coat*)

GRAHAM. Darlington has been moralising and talking about the purity of love and that sort of thing, and he has got some woman in his rooms all the time.

LORD L. No! Really? Really?

GRAHAM. Yes, here is her fan!

LORD L. By Jove! (*chuckling*)

LORD W. (*up by door*) I am really off now, Lord Darlington. I am sorry you are leaving England so soon. Pray call on us when you come back. My wife and I will be charmed to see you.

LORD D. (*up stage with* LORD WINDERMERE) I am afraid I shall be away for many years. Good-night.

GRAHAM. Arthur!

LORD W. What?

GRAHAM. I want to speak to you for a moment. Now, do come!

LORD W. (*putting on his coat*) I can't—I'm off!

GRAHAM. It is something very particular. It will interest you enormously.

LORD W. It is some nonsense, Cecil.

GRAHAM. It isn't. It isn't really.

LORD L. (*going to him*) My dear fellow, you mustn't go yet. I have a lot to talk to you about. And Cecil has something to show you.

LORD W. (*walking over*) Well, what is it?

GRAHAM. Darlington has got a woman here in his rooms. Here is her fan. Amusing, isn't it?

LORD W. Good God! (*seizes it*; DUMBY *rises*)

GRAHAM. What is it?

LORD W. Lord Darlington! (*goes* C.)

LORD D. Yes?

LORD W. (CECIL *takes* LORD WINDERMERE *by the arm*) What is my wife's fan doing in your rooms? Hands off, Cecil, don't touch me.

LORD D. Your wife's fan?
LORD W. Yes, here it is!
LORD D. I don't know!
LORD W. You *must* know. I demand an explanation. (*to* GRAHAM, *who drops his arm and goes* C.) Don't hold me, you fool!
LORD D. (*aside*) She is here after all?
LORD W. By God, speak, sir! Why is my wife's fan here? Answer me! I'll search your rooms, and if my wife's here —I'll—(*moves*)
LORD D. You shall not search my rooms. You have no right to. I forbid you.
LORD W. You scoundrel! I'll not leave your room till I have searched every corner of it! (*goes up*) That curtain! (DARLINGTON *about to stop him*)
MRS. E. (*enters* R.) Lord Windermere!
LORD W. Mrs. Erlynne! (*all start and turn round;* MR. DUMBY *leaves his chair and rushes forward*; LADY WINDERMERE *slips out*)
MRS. E. I am afraid I took your wife's fan in mistake for my own when I was leaving your house to-night. I am so sorry. (*takes fan from him*)

VERY QUICK CURTAIN.

# ACT IV.

SCENE.—*Same as Act I.*

LADY W. (*seated* R.) How can I tell him? I can't tell him. It would kill me. I wonder what happened after I escaped from that horrible room. Perhaps she told them the true reason of her being there, and the real meaning of that fatal fan of mine. Oh, if he knows—how can I look him in the face again? He would never forgive me. (*rings bell on desk*) How securely one thinks one lives—out of the reach of temptation, sin, folly—and then suddenly——Ah! Life is terrible. It rules us, we don't rule it.

*Enter* ROSALIE R.

ROSALIE. Did your ladyship ring for me?
LADY W. Yes. Have you found out what time Lord Windermere came in last night?
ROSALIE. His lordship did not come in till five o'clock.
LADY W. Five o'clock? He knocked at my door this morning, didn't he?
ROSALIE. Yes, my lady - at half-past nine.
LADY W. Did he say anything?
ROSALIE Something about your ladyship's fan. I didn't quite catch what his lordship said. Has the fan been lost, my lady? I can't find it. It was not left in any of the rooms. I've looked in all of them, and on the terrace as well.
LADY W. It doesn't matter. That will do. (*exit* ROSALIE R.) (*rising and going* C.) She is sure to tell him. I can fancy a person doing a wonderful act of self sacrifice, doing it spontaneously, recklessly, nobly—and afterwards finding that it costs too much. Why should she hesitate between her ruin and mine? Well, even if *she* doesn't tell, *I* must. (*starts as* LORD WINDERMERE *enters* R.)
LORD W. Margaret, (*goes* C. *and kisses her*) how pale you look.
LADY W. I slept very badly.
LORD W. (*sitting on sofa with her*) I am so sorry. I came in dreadfully late, and didn't like to wake you. You are crying, dear.
LADY W. Yes, I am crying, for I have something to tell you, Arthur.
LORD W. My dear child, you're not well. You've been

doing too much. Let us go away to the country. You'll be all right at Selby. The season is almost over. There is no use staying on. We'll go to-day if you like. (*rises*) We can easily catch the 3.40. I'll send a wire. (*sits down at table to write a telegram*)

LADY W. Yes, let us go away to-day. No, I can't go to-day. There is someone I must see before I leave town—someone who has been kind to me.

LORD W. (*rising and leaning over sofa*) Kind to you?

LADY W. Far more than that. I will tell you Arthur, but only love me, love me as you used to love me.

LORD W. Used to? You are thinking of that wretched woman who came here last night. (*coming round and sitting* R. *of her*) You don't still imagine—no, you couldn't.

LADY W. I don't. I now know I was wrong and foolish.

LORD W. Margaret, it was very good of you to receive her last night—but you are never to see her again.

LADY W. Why do you say that?

LORD W. I thought she was a woman who was more sinned against than sinning, as the phrase goes. I thought she wanted to be good, to get back into a place that she lost by a moment's folly, to lead again a decent life. I believed what she told me. I was mistaken in her. She is bad—as bad as a woman can be!

LADY W. Arthur, Arthur, don't talk so bitterly about any woman. I don't think Mrs. Erlynne is a bad woman. I know she's not.

LORD W. My dear child, the woman's impossible. No matter what harm she tries to do us you must never see her again.

LADY W. I want to see her. I want her to come here again.

LORD W. Never!

LADY W. She came here once as *your* guest; she must come now as *mine*. That is but fair.

LORD W. She should *never* have come here.

LADY W. (*rising*) It is too late, Arthur, to say that now. (*moves away*)

LORD W. (*rising*) Margaret, if you knew where Mrs. Erlynne went last night, after she *left* this house, you would not (*pause*) sit in the same room with her. It was absolutely shameless, the whole thing!

LADY W. Arthur, I can't bear it any longer. I must tell you. Last night——

*Enter* PARKER, R., *with a tray on which is* LADY WINDERMERE'S *fan and a card.*

PARKER. Mrs. Erlynne has called to return your ladyship's fan, which she took away by mistake last night. Mrs. Erlynne has written a message on the card.

LADY W. Oh, ask Mrs. Erlynne to be kind enough to come up. (*reads card*) Say I will be very glad to see her. (*exit* PARKER R.) She wants to see me.

LORD W. (*takes card and looks at it*) Margaret, I *beg* you not to. Let me see her first, at any rate. She's a very dangerous woman. You don't realise what you're doing.

LADY W. It is right that I should see her.

LORD W. My child, you may be on the brink of a great sorrow, don't go to meet it. It is absolutely necessary that I should see her before you do. (*goes up* C.)

LADY W. Why should it be necessary? (*crossing* R.C.)

*Enter* PARKER.

PARKER. Mrs. Erlynne.

*Enter* MRS. ERLYNNE; *exit* PARKER R.

MRS. E. (*to* LORD WINDERMERE) How do you do? How do you do, Lady Windermere? Do you know, I am so sorry about your fan. I can't imagine how I made such a silly mistake. Most stupid of me. And as I am leaving London at once, I thought I would take the opportunity of returning your property with many apologies for my carelessness, and of bidding you good-bye.

LADY W. Good-bye? Are you going away, Mrs. Erlynne? (*sitting*)

MRS. E. Yes, I am going to live abroad again. The English climate doesn't suit me. My—heart is affected here, and that I don't like. I prefer living in the South. London is too full of fogs and—serious people, Lord Windermere. Whether the fogs produce the serious people, or whether the serious people produce the fogs, I don't know, but the whole thing rather gets on my nerves. And so I'm leaving this afternoon by the Club train.

LADY W. This afternoon? But I wanted so much to see you.

MRS. E. I am afraid I have to go.

LADY W. Shall I never see you again, Mrs. Erlynne?

MRS. E. I am afraid not. Our lives lie too far apart. But there is one little thing I would like you to do for me. I want a photograph of you, Lady Windermere—will you give me one? You don't know how gratified I should be.

LADY W. Oh, with pleasure. (*rising and going to bureau*) There is one on that table, I'll show it to you.

LORD W. (*aside to* MRS. ERLYNNE) It is monstrous your intruding yourself here after your conduct last night.

MRS. E. (*shrugging her shoulders*) My dear Windermere, manners before morals! (LORD WINDERMERE *goes down* R.)

LADY W. (*back of sofa*) I am afraid it is very flattering—I am not so pretty as that.

MRS. E. You are much prettier, but haven't you got one of yourself with your little boy?

LADY W. I have; would you prefer it?

MRS. E. Yes.

LADY W. I'll go and get it for you if you'll excuse me a moment. I have one upstairs.

MRS. E. So sorry, Lady Windermere, to give you so much trouble.

LADY W. No trouble at all, Mrs. Erlynne.

MRS. E. Thanks so much. (*exit* LADY WINDERMERE R.) You seem rather out of temper this morning, Windermere. Why should you be? Your wife and I get on charmingly together.

LORD W. I hate to see you with her. Besides, you have not told me the truth, Mrs. Erlynne.

MRS. E. I have not told *her* the truth, you mean.

LORD W. (C.) I sometimes wish you had. I would have been spared then the misery, the anxiety, the annoyance of the last six months. But rather than my wife should know —that the mother whom she was taught to consider as dead, is living—a divorced woman, going about under an assumed name, a bad woman as I know you now to be—rather than that, I was ready to supply you with money to pay bill after bill, extravagance after extravagance, to risk what occurred yesterday, the first quarrel I have ever had with my wife. You don't understand what that means to me. How could you? But I tell you that the only bitter words that ever came from those sweet lips of hers were on your account, and I hate to see you next her. You sully the innocence that is in her. I used to think you were frank and honest. You are not. (*moves* L.C.)

MRS. E. Why do you say that?

LORD W. You made me get you an invitation to my wife's ball.

MRS. E. For my daughter's ball—yes.

LORD W. You came, and within an hour of your leaving the house you are found in a man's rooms—you are disgraced before everyone. (*going* C.)

MRS. E. Yes.

LORD W. Therefore I have a right to look upon you as what you are—a worthless vicious woman. I have the right

to tell you never to enter this house, never to attempt to come near my wife——

MRS E. My daughter, please.

LORD W. You have no right to claim her as your daughter. You left her, abandoned her when she was a child in the cradle, abandoned her for your lover, who abandoned you in turn.

MRS E. (*rising*) Do you count that to his credit, Lord Windermere, or to mine?

LORD W. To his, now that I know you.

MRS. E. Take care, you had better be careful.

LORD W. Oh, I am not going to mince words for you. I know you thoroughly.

MRS. E. I question that.

LORD W. (C.) I *do* know you. For twenty years of your life you lived without your child, without a thought of your child. One day you read in the papers that she had married a rich man. You saw your chance. You knew that to spare her the ignominy of learning that a woman like you was her mother, I would endure anything. You began your—blackmailing.

MRS. E. Don't use ugly words, Windermere. They are vulgar. I saw my chance, it is true, and took it.

LORD W. Yes, you took it—and spoiled it all last night by being found out. (*crosses* L.)

MRS. E. Yes, I spoiled it all last night.

LORD W. (*down* L.) And as for your blunder in taking my wife's fan from here and leaving it in Darlington's rooms, it is unpardonable. I can't bear the sight of it now. I shall never let my wife use it again. The thing is soiled for me. You should have kept it and not brought it back.

MRS. E. I think I *shall* keep it. (*goes up*) It's extremely pretty. (*takes up fan*) I shall ask Margaret to give it to me.

LORD W. I hope my wife *will* give it to you.

MRS. E. Oh, I'm sure she will have no objection.

LORD W. I wish that at the same time she would give you a miniature she kisses every night before she prays—the miniature of a young innocent-looking girl with wonderful dark hair.

MRS. E. Ah, yes—I remember. How long ago it seems. It was done before I was married. (*sits*) Dark hair and an innocent expression were the fashion then.

LORD W. What do you mean by coming here this morning? What is your object? (*crossing* L.C. *and sitting*)

MRS. E. To bid good-bye to my dear daughter, of course. Oh, don't imagine I am going to have a pathetic scene with her and weep on her neck and tell her who I am, and all

that kind of thing. I have no ambition to play the part of a mother. Only once in my life have I known a mother's feelings. That was last night. They were terrible—they made me suffer—made me suffer too much. For twenty years, as you say, I have lived childless. (*rises*) I want to live childless still. Besides my dear Windermere, how on earth could I pose as a mother with a grown-up daughter? Margaret is twenty-one, and I have never admitted that I am more than twenty-nine, or thirty at the most. Twenty-nine when there are pink shades—thirty when there are not. So you see what difficulties it would involve. No, so far as I am concerned, let your wife cherish the memory of this dead, stainless mother. Why should I interfere with her illusions? I find it hard enough to keep my own. I lost one illusion last night. I thought I had no heart. I find I have, and a heart doesn't suit me, Windermere. Somehow it doesn't go with modern dress, and it makes one look old, and spoils one's career at critical moments. (*standing at back of chair* L.C.)

LORD W. You fill me with horror—with absolute horror!

MRS. E. (*rising and going to him*) I suppose, Windermere, you would like me to retire into a convent or become a hospital nurse or something of that sort, as people do in silly modern novels. That is stupid of you, Arthur. In real life we don't do such things—not as long as we have any good looks left, at any rate. What consoles one is not repentance, but pleasure. Repentance is out of date. And besides, if a woman really repents, she has to go to a bad dressmaker, otherwise no one believes her. And nothing in the world would induce me to do that! No, I am going to pass entirely out of your lives. My coming into them has been a mistake—I discovered that last night.

LORD W. (*rises*) I am sorry now I did not tell my wife the whole thing at once.

MRS. E. I regret my bad actions. You regret your good ones—that is the difference between us.

LORD W. I don't trust you. I *shall* tell my wife. It's better for her to know, and from me. It will cause her infinite pain—it will humiliate her terribly—but it is right that she should know.

MRS. E. You propose to tell her?

LORD W. I am going to tell her.

MRS. E. (*rising*) If you do, I will make my name so infamous that it will mar every moment of her life. It will ruin her, and make her wretched. You shall not tell her—I forbid you.

LORD W. Why?

MRS. E. (*after a pause*) If I said to you that I cared for her, perhaps loved her even—you would sneer at me, wouldn't you? (*pause*)

LORD W. I should feel it was not true. A mother's love means devotion, unselfishness, sacrifice. What can *you* know of such things?

MRS. E. You are right. What can I know of such things! Don't let us talk any more about it—as for telling my daughter who I am, that I do not allow. Besides, it is my secret, it is not yours. If I make up my mind to tell her, and I think I will, I shall tell her before I leave the house —if not, I shall never tell her.

LORD W. Then let me beg of you to leave our house now. I will make your excuses to Margaret.

*Enter* LADY WINDERMERE R.

LADY W. I am so sorry, Mrs. Erlynne, to have kept you waiting. I couldn't find the photograph anywhere. At last I discovered it in my husband's dressing-room—he had stolen it.

MRS. E. I am not surprised—it is charming. And so this is your little boy—what is he called? (*sitting on sofa*)

LADY W. Gerard, after my dear father.

MRS. E. (*laying the photograph down*) Really?

LADY W. (*sitting on sofa*) Yes—if—if it had been a girl I should have called it after my mother. She had the same name as myself, Margaret.

MRS. E. My name is Margaret too.

LADY W. Indeed!

MRS. E. Yes. (*pause*) You are devoted to your mother's memory, Lady Windermere, your husband tells me.

LADY W. We have all ideals in life. At least we all *should* have. *Mine* is my mother.

MRS. E. Ideals are dangerous things. Realities are better. They wound, but they're better.

LADY W. No, if I lost my ideals, I should lose everything.

MRS. E. Everything?

LADY W. Yes. (*pause*)

MRS. E. Did your father often speak to you about your mother?

LADY W. No, it gave him too much pain. He told me how she had died a few months after I was born. His eyes filled with tears as he spoke. Then he begged me never to mention her name to him again. It made him suffer even to hear it. My father—my father really died of a broken heart.

MRS. E. (*rising*) I think I must go now, Lady Windermere.

LADY W. (*rising*) Oh, no, don't.

MRS. E. I think I had better. My carriage must have come back by this time. I sent it to Lady Jedburgh's with a note.

LADY W. Arthur, would you mind seeing if Mrs. Erlynne's carriage has come back? (*exit* LORD WINDERMERE C.) What am I to say to you? You saved me last night.

MRS. E. Hush—don't speak of it.

LADY W. (C.) I must speak of it. I can't let you think that I am going to accept this sacrifice. I am not. It is too great—I am going to tell my husband everything. It is my duty.

MRS. E. It is not your duty—at least you have duties to others besides him. You say you owe *me* something.

LADY W. I owe you everything.

MRS. E. Then pay your debt by silence. That is the only way in which it can be paid. Don't spoil the one good thing I have done in my life by telling it to anyone. Promise me that what passed last night will remain a secret between us. Don't bring misery into your husband's life. Why spoil his love? You must not spoil it. Love is easily killed. Pledge me your word, Lady Windermere, that you will *never* tell him. I insist upon it.

LADY W. I pledge you my word. It is your will, not mine.

MRS. E. Yes, it is my will. And never forget your child. I like to think of you as a mother—I like you to think of yourself as one.

LADY W. I always will now. Only once in my life I have forgotten my mother—that was last night. Oh, if I had remembered her, I should not have been so foolish.

MRS. E. Hush, last night is quite over.

*Enter* LORD WINDERMERE C.

LORD W. Your carriage is not come back yet.

MRS. E. It makes no matter. I'll take a cab. And, now, dear Lady Windermere—I am afraid it is really good-bye. (*moves up* C.) Oh, I remember. You'll think me absurd but do you know I've taken a great fancy to this fan that I was silly enough to run away with last night from your ball. Now, I wonder would you give it to me? Lord Windermere says you may. I know it is his present.

LADY W. Oh, certainly, (*picking fan up from sofa and handing it to her*)—if it will give you any pleasure. But it has my name on it. It has Margaret on it.

MRS. E. But we have the same Christian name.

LADY W. Oh, I forgot. Of course, do have it. What a wonderful chance our names being the same.

MRS. E. Quite wonderful. Thanks—it will always remind me of you.

*Enter* PARKER C.

PARKER. Lord Augustus Lorton.

*Enter* LORD AUGUSTUS C.

LORD L. Good morning, dear boy. Good morning, Lady Windermere. (*sees* MRS. ERLYNNE) Good morning, Mrs. Erlynne.

MRS. E. How do you do, Lord Augustus? Are you quite well this morning?

LORD L. (L.C. *coldly*) Quite well, thank you, Mrs. Erlynne.

MRS. E. You don't look quite well, Lord Augustus. You stop up too late—it is so bad for you. You really should take more care of yourself. Good-bye, Lord Windermere, again. (*goes towards door with a bow to* LORD AUGUSTUS, *smiles and looks back at him*) Lord Augustus! Won't you see me to my cab? You might carry the fan.

LORD W. (*up stage* R.) Allow me!

MRS. E. No, I want Lord Augustus. I have a message for the dear Duchess. Won't you carry the fan?

LORD L. (*coldly*) If you really desire it, Mrs. Erlynne.

MRS. E. Of course I do. You'll carry it so gracefully! You carry off anything gracefully. (*pauses for a moment, looks at* LADY WINDERMERE, *sighs, then exits smiling* C., *followed by* LORD AUGUSTUS)

LADY W. You will never speak against Mrs. Erlynne again, Arthur, will you?

LORD W. She is better than one thought her.

LADY W. She is better than I am!

LORD W. Child, you and she belong to different worlds. Into your world evil has never entered.

LADY W. Don't say that, Arthur. There is the same world for all of us, and good and evil, sin and innocence, go through it hand in hand. To shut one's eyes to half of life that one may live securely is as though one blinded oneself that one might walk with more safety in a land of pit and precipice. (*goes* R.)

LORD W. (*moves* R.C. *with her*) Darling, why do you say that?

LADY W. (*sits on sofa*) Because I, who had shut my eyes to life, came to the brink. And one who had separated us——

LORD W. We were never separated.

LADY W. We never must be again. Oh, Arthur, don't love me less, and I will trust you more. I will trust you absolutely. Let us go to Selby. In the Rose Garden at Selby the roses are white and red.

*Enter* LORD AUGUSTUS C.

LORD L. Arthur, she has explained everything. (LADY WINDERMERE *looks horribly frightened at this* ; LORD WINDERMERE *starts* ; LORD AUGUSTUS *takes* WINDERMERE *by the arm and brings him to the front of the stage, he talks rapidly and in a low voice* ; LADY WINDERMERE *stands watching them in terror*)

LORD L. My dear fellow, she has explained every damned thing. We all wronged her immensely. It was entirely for my sake she went to Darlington's rooms. She called at the Club—fact is—wanted to put me out of my suspense—and being told I had gone there—followed—naturally frightened when she heard a lot of us coming in—retired to another room. I assure you, most gratifying to me—the whole thing. We all behaved brutally to her. She is just the woman for me. Suits me down to the ground. All the conditions she makes are that we live entirely out of England. A very good thing, too, Damned clubs, damned climate, damned cooks, damned everything ! Sick of it all !

LADY W. (*frightened*) Has Mrs. Erlynne—— ?

LORD L. Yes, Lady Windermere. Mrs. Erlynne has done me the honour of accepting my hand.

LORD W. Well, you are certainly marrying a very clever woman !

LADY W. Ah, you're marrying a very good woman !

SLOW CURTAIN.